



The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and the chairperson of a key UN Committee have hailed a new human rights mechanism that has just come into force as a major advance in ensuring all rights are protected as envisaged by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights 65 years ago.

The Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights enables people to seek justice when their rights to, for example, food, adequate housing, education or health are violated.

"Egregious violations of economic, social and cultural rights are occurring, often unnoticed, on a daily basis, which in the area of civil and political rights would have been immediately condemned. This Protocol will help to address this imbalance," High Commissioner Navi Pillay said on Monday.

Chair of the Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Committee Zdzislaw Kedzia said: "The

international community has a good reason to celebrate this vital step towards a better protection of economic, social and cultural rights."

The Optional Protocol allows the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights - the body of UN independent experts that monitors the International Covenant to which the Protocol is attached - to examine complaints from individuals or groups of individuals who have exhausted all attempts to find justice in their own country.

It also enables the Committee to conduct inquiries if it receives reliable information indicating grave or systematic violations by a State party of any of the rights covered by the Covenant.

"I am confident that these mechanisms will make it possible for the Committee to assist States and other stakeholders to get to the root causes of violations of economic, social and cultural rights," said Pillay.

The Protocol took effect on 5 May, three months after Uruguay became the required tenth country to ratify it and joined Argentina, Bolivia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ecuador, El Salvador, Mongolia, Portugal, Slovakia and Spain.

Mr Kedzia called on the other States among the 160 that are party to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights to ratify the Optional Protocol as soon as possible.

"In a way we are still at the beginning of the road. How fast we will progress on it will depend on all stakeholders," he said.

Only individuals from countries who have ratified the Protocol can bring complaints to the Committee.

The equivalent Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights came into force 37 years ago (in March 1976), and has been ratified by 114 States.

**Additional links:**

- Full text of the [Optional Protocol](#)
- Full text of the [provisional rules of procedure under the Optional Protocol](#)
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